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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ANTANANARIVO 001227

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FROM THE AMBASSADOR  
DEPT PASS A/S FRAZER IN SECRETARY'S PARTY  
DEPT FOR AF/E AND AF/FO

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [ECON](#) [SOCI](#) [EAID](#) [CN](#)  
SUBJECT: COMOROS: HOPE REMAINS FOR A NEGOTIATED ANJOUAN  
SETTLEMENT

REF: A. A) ANTANANARIVO 1210  
[1](#)B. B) ANTANANARIVO 1221

Classified By: Ambassador Niels Marquardt for reasons 1.4 (a) and (b)

[1](#)1. (C) I visited Moroni November 28-30 to take stock of political and economic developments there, and to pave the way for A/S Frazer's December 22-23 visit there. This visit came in the immediate wake of the AU Peace and Security Council's (PSC) see ref tel a) decision to extend Anjouan sanctions for 60 days, until approximately January 25. Even more than during my previous two visits, the continuing Anjouan crisis was the sole topic in many of my discussions. However, I also had a useful exchange with the Union Economy Minister about ongoing reforms intended to improve the investment and business climate. He and others said they would welcome AGOA eligibility as consistent with their efforts to create private sector solutions to their economic challenges. Also on this visit, I launched a long-gestating USAID distance learning project, held a news conference also attended by my Comoran counterpart in the U.S. (at which Anjouan, not the education program, was the main topic), and visited civil works projects under way by two dozen soldiers and Seabees from CJTF-HOA. These activities, coupled with anticipation of the visit of Ambassador Frazer and the participation of the USG in the November 28 AfDB debt relief conference for the Comoros in Paris, have raised the U.S. profile in the Comoros, as well as popular hope that our engagement will continue and intensify.

Anjouan, Anjouan, Anjouan ) To Invade or to Negotiate?  
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[1](#)2. (C) Anjouan was the focus of my discussions with President Sambi, Foreign Minister Jaffar, Defense Minister Dossar, Army Chief of Staff Salimou, the Ambassadors of France, South Africa, and the AU, Grande Comore (Ngazidja) Island President Abdulwahid, and former Union President Azali. Already caught between a rock and a hard place over his failure to either resolve Anjouan or advance the development agenda on which he was elected, Sambi was clearly angry and perhaps also off balance following the AU PSC decision to extend sanctions. His only request to me was for help in convincing the French to intervene massively and militarily. He then abruptly left for Tanzania, leading to speculation that he might be asking President Kikwete for military support from the 200 Tanzanian troops sent in June to monitor elections and still encamped in Moroni. The French Ambassador immediately dismissed the French military option with me ) a point he made unambiguously and at length in my presence at a lunch also attended by both the Defense Minister and Chief of Staff (and thus surely reported back to Sambi shortly after his return from Tanzania). The South African, representing the one other country some Comorans might eye for military support, also denied that option categorically. (I also spoke to the Moroccan Ambassador in Antananarivo, who readily admits that Morocco is providing arms to Sambi but also stresses that they are advising restraint at the same time.)

[1](#)3. (C) Indeed, a common refrain in my discussions was &who would ever intervene militarily in a foreign conflict that has not yet even become violent? Responding to widespread unease and after graffiti appeared overnight in "downtown" Moroni demanding that the AU leave, AU Rep Mourad held his own press conference on November 29 to explain that the first 45 days of sanctions had been ineffective mainly because they only started to be enforced on Day 20; therefore, the PSC decided that more time is needed. Former Union President Azali and Island President Abdulwahid) an erstwhile Sambi

ally perceived to have betrayed Sambi with his own October trip to see Colonel Bacar in Anjouan ) joined the French, South African, AU Rep and others in expressing remaining hope for a negotiated solution that would lead to legitimate Anjouan elections. The Grande Comoran President was unapologetic for his initiative toward Bacar (about whom he said he has no illusions) and said that it was "the responsibility of Comorans like himself to explore every possible avenue" to resolving this impasse, even if it meant discomfort in his relations with Sambi. The view shared by him, Azali, and most others is that poisoned personal relations with Bacar make it impossible for Sambi to be the one to take any initiative toward negotiations with Bacar;

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this also explains Sambi's continuing focus on an invasion as the only remaining solution. No contact outside his government supports Sambi's view.

Could a Comoran Solution lead to Anjouan Elections?  
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14. (C) A/S Frazer's December 22-23 visit will be well-timed for her to reinforce the message to Sambi and others that negotiation, not invasion, is the way forward. If Sambi himself is not in a position -- and I agree that he is not -- to advance an initiative toward Bacar that would allow new Anjouan elections, he might be persuaded to tolerate other Comorans ) perhaps the other two Island Presidents ) being given space and/or even a mandate to do so. Reliance on the AU alone is unrealistic, as the AU processes are untested, slow, and cumbersome -- and the solution should be Comoran if it is to endure. One hard red line that no one seems willing to cross is allowing Bacar, having seized power illegitimately, to represent Anjouan in any negotiation; some guarantees to Bacar of future safety may therefore be the price of getting him to step back and allow elections. (This might be a legitimate non-military role the French could play -- to offer Bacar and his immediate family asylum if he believes his personal safety could not be guaranteed if he loses the Anjouan election, or if he chooses not to run.) After elections, there seems to be consensus that a Comoran Round-Table Discussion will be necessary to revisit remaining problems with the complex constitution currently in force. However, a second red line precludes any discussion of those issues before Anjouan elections are held.

Meanwhile, Reforming the Economy  
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15. (C) There were a few more glimmers of hope during the visit on economic issues. The AfDB Debt Relief Conference in Paris, which ended while I was there, was widely discussed and covered in the press, and seen as a great success, however incomplete. American participation in the meeting was warmly welcomed, even as American failure to contribute financially was also noted. I met separately with the Union Economy Minister, who was pleased to share ongoing efforts to streamline the economy. He is close to creating a One-Stop Investment Shop which, he said, will require investment authorizations to be granted within three days. I met with a visiting ILO team looking at supporting a micro-finance project to support women entrepreneurs; they had also met with the Minister, and declared his workplan to be solid from a policy perspective. The enabling law has already been passed simplifying and streamlining business start-up procedures; all that remains is a Presidential Decree which he expects before the end of December. He expressed hope that the Comoros would be found eligible for AGOA as a way to stimulate investment from and trade with the U.S. He initially expressed willingness to open their market on a reciprocal basis but was pleased to understand that AGOA grants access to the U.S. market unilaterally. We also explained to him USG concerns about how the Anjouan situation might affect AGOA eligibility and/or operations. After explaining how the Union and Island customs departments divide their responsibilities, he replied that Anjouan is a passing problem that will be resolved shortly.

MARQUARDT